

Midwifery and Folk Medicine in Russian and Ukrainian Tradition:

The Role of Women, Witchcraft and Ritual in Health

By: Cali P. Machen



Folk Medicine and Women Healers:

Because illness was common, folk healers were an important part of early Slavic communities. Unexplained illness was believed to be of magical origin, so healers were magical beings. Healers were often postmenopausal women known as baba or babky, who specialized in incantations, potions and rituals.



Birth Rituals:

- Bathing the birther and infant
- Burying the placenta
- Cooking at the Christening
- Wiping the newborn with soft bread
- Bringing the birther food
- Cutting the umbilical cord
- Fixing dislocations in the infant
- Using herbs to stop bleeding

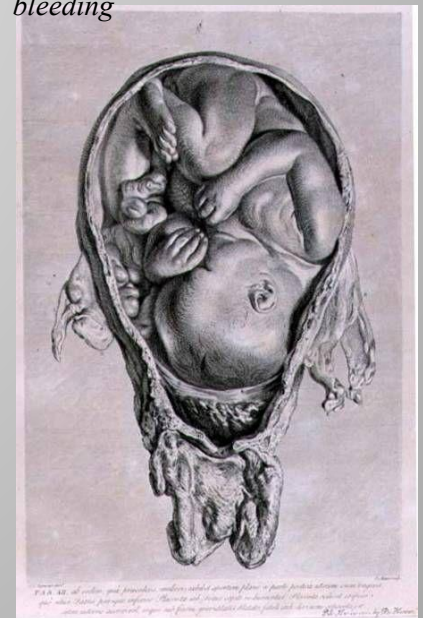
Common Rituals:

- The Wax Ritual
- Divination
- Herbal rituals
- Religious Prayers



The Role of Midwives:

Similar to healers, midwives were old women who were essential to communities for healing and birthing. They were religious women who relied on their experience, God and the birther's body to deliver children.



▲ Fig. 1
Vorizka ("The
Soothsayer") painting
by Janette Shewchuk
of Warren, Man,
showing the traditional
Ukrainian divination/
healing technique of
pouring molten wax
into a bowl of cold
water held over the
patient while reciting a
prayer. (Courtesy of
Canadian Museum of
Civilization, neg. no.
K86-594)

